

AMERICAN EMBASSY'S NATIONAL DAILY PRESS REVIEW

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Today's Top Stories

1. Chinese Foreign Minister kicks off African tour in Cote d'Ivoire
2. Opposition papers say President Ouattara's Western support is falling apart
3. Gbagbo's youth wing leader reiterates call for dialogue as major opposition coalition stumbles

1. Chinese Foreign Minister kicks off African tour in Cote d'Ivoire

President Alassane Ouattara held talks yesterday in Abidjan with Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi. According to a report on RTI yesterday during the evening news bulletin, discussions focused on the multi-faceted cooperation between Cote d'Ivoire and China. "The Chinese government commends Ivorian authorities for the recent achievements made to regain stability and for its actions to promote national reconciliation and the recovery of the economy," Mr. Yang reportedly said as he committed the Chinese government to supporting Ivorians in these efforts. Speaking to journalists after his meeting with the Ivorian leader, Mr. Yang underscored that the long history of cooperation between Cote d'Ivoire and China will be strengthened this year.

Still on the meeting, L'Intelligent d'Abidjan (p. 7) noted that President Ouattara also thanked the Chinese government for their support for development in the country and their contribution to the resolution of the Ivorian crisis. The meeting, the paper said, was the initial step of a tour that will bring the Chinese official to various African countries.

In a related development, Nord Sud Quotidien (p. 5) noted that a CFA Francs 9.5 billion (approximately US \$18 million) loan was granted by the Chinese government to Cote d'Ivoire. The information was given by the Ivorian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Daniel Kablan Duncan, who had a separate meeting with the Chinese envoy. Mr. Duncan also announced the Chinese government's decision to write-off some Ivorian debts.

2. Opposition papers say President Ouattara's Western support is falling apart

According to Le Temps (pp. 6 & 7) President Ouattara's western support is falling apart. The paper alleged that the decision by the British government to close its embassy in Abidjan, added to the recent move by the Canadian authorities to delocalize their Abidjan mission to Dakar, Senegal are blatant signs that western countries are distancing themselves from the Ivorian leader's regime. According to the daily, the unattended security issues and the high level of crime threat in Cote d'Ivoire are the reasons for this setback.

In a similar account, Le Quotidien d'Abidjan (p. 9) noted that, like the United States did earlier, Canadian authorities have issued a travel warning advising their citizens to avoid unnecessary travel to Cote d'Ivoire. According to a report culled from a web page, the security situation in Abidjan as well as along the Liberian border and in zones formerly controlled by the Forces Nouvelles remains unpredictable.

In a separate development and citing insiders, Le Temps (p. 5) noted the French Licorne forces stationed in Cote d'Ivoire will depart the country. The daily argued that the issue was recently discussed at the French Parliament. The announcement, the paper said, has triggered doubts within the ruling coalition which has been receiving military support from these forces since it gained power.

3. Gbagbo's youth wing leader reiterates call for dialogue as major opposition coalition stumbles

In a statement issued yesterday and published in Notre Voie (p. 2), Mr. Charles Ble Goude, former president Laurent Gbagbo's youth wing leader, reiterated his call for a dialogue between the government and opposition parties. According to the fugitive known for his hard-line rhetoric against President Ouattara and western countries, the time for mutual forgiveness has come. "I call on all of those who have been humiliated to forgive," he reportedly said, adding that discussions are of paramount importance for a "new national consensus to rescue the country and to consolidate social cohesion."

L'Intelligent d'Abidjan (pp. 4 & 5) remains skeptical about the hidden motivation for such a U-turn. The daily argued that Mr. Ble Goude's drive could be part of a political maneuver to deceive the ruling coalition. The daily went on suggesting that Gbagbo's right hand man, whose striking abilities to mobilize youth in the streets remains a powerful asset, is feared both by Gbagbo partisans and members of the ruling coalition.

Mr. Ble Goude's message came as dissension is being reported among members of the Congres National de la Resistance pour Democratie (CNDR) - a coalition of partisans of former president Laurent Gbagbo. According to Soir Info (p. 5) two rival groups led by Mr. Maika Oureto (the acting president of the FPI party) and Mr. Gervais Coulibaly are at loggerheads. The dissension has led to the creation of a rival group dubbed the LMP (Ligue des Mouvements pour le Progres).

On a different issue, L'Inter (pp. 6 & 7) noted that a session to confirm charges against ex-president Laurent Gbagbo currently under custody at the International Criminal Court (ICC) is scheduled for June 18 this year. The court will have ten days to decide whether or not the Ivorian former leader should be tried for crimes against humanity and human right violations, the paper said, adding that discussions will undoubtedly be lively.

Still on human rights issues, Le Patriote (p. 2) noted that French prosecutor Patrick Ramael is in Cote d'Ivoire to further investigate the case of French investigative journalist Guy-Andre Kieffer whose whereabouts are unknown since his 2006 disappearance in Abidjan.

Le Nouveau Courrier (p. 4) on its part noted that, according to people close to the case, a high-level official from the current ruling regime could be involved in the kidnapping of the reporter.

Note: Opposition newspaper Aujourd'hui was not published today; it has been suspended by the Conseil National de la Presse, Cote d'Ivoire's print media regulator.